Congress Hears Reasons Why Research Needs Funding Boost

A Texas representative receives the congressional Platinum Award for his efforts to substantially increase funding for research into posttraumatic stress disorder and traumatic brain injury.

BY RICH DALY

Twenty-five psychiatric researchers urged members of Congress to earmark more resources for the study of mental health conditions and recognized a prominent legislator for his successful efforts in that area.

The 24th annual meeting of APA’s Academic Consortium, held September 5 and 6, brought psychiatric researchers from across the country to Washington D.C., to meet with lawmakers and their staffs on the issue of authorizing adequate funding for mental health research. This year nearly 70 visits to congressional offices took place.

The researchers, who included some of the country’s leading mental health investigators, received updates from APA and congressional staff at the beginning of the consortium meeting on the areas where funding was most needed and then used that information to urge their federal representatives for increased monies for the National Institutes of Health and various types of federally funded psychiatric research.

“By participating, we are able to inform people who are in decision-making capacities both related to the research agenda and resources for research in the United States, as well as the treatment agenda in providing the necessary resources for care,” said Stuart Yudofsky, M.D., vice chair of APA’s Council on Research.

The attendees took APA-supported research findings to the offices of members of Congress, including data on the costs to businesses and the economy in general of mental illness and substance abuse. One recent finding they highlighted, for example, was that 18 million Americans over age 17 suffer from alcohol abuse or dependence, at an estimated annual cost of $185 billion.

One member of Congress who has heard and acted on reports of the significant toll that untreated mental illness takes on the nation is Rep. Chet Edwards (D-Texas), chair of the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Military Construction and Veterans Affairs. He received the APA Platinum Award—presented each year during the consortium to honor a member of Congress for exceptional dedication to mental health issues—for his push to double health care funding for veterans and his efforts to educate his colleagues about posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and traumatic brain injury.

“With so many combat troops returning home from Iraq and Afghanistan with serious mental health care issues, vital PTSD research and treatment are needed to help them readjust to the stresses of civilian life,” Edwards said. “Our veterans earned quality mental health care and benefits when they put on our nation’s uniform, and I will continue to pursue this goal passionately.”

This year alone, Edwards added provisions to appropriations bills that would provide $1.4 million for a joint VA-Department of Defense research program that focuses on whether genes and brain anatomy play a role in the root causes of PTSD and related stress disorders.

Yudofsky, who presented the award, said Edward’s efforts to secure additional research funding are especially timely because of the large numbers of injured returning veterans, whose needs are “professional time intensive and tend to be resource intensive.”

“If they have PTSD or suffer from the sequelae of traumatic brain injury or issues related to substance abuse, we now—thanks to him and others—have more resources” to devote to the treatment of these veterans, Yudofsky said.

Other activities during the consortium included briefings by Mark Willenbring, M.D., director of the Division of Treatment and Recovery Research at the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism; Richard Nakamura, Ph.D., deputy director of the National Institute of Mental Health; and Timothy Condon, Ph.D., deputy director of the National Institute on Drug Abuse.

Participants also were briefed on legislative developments in Congress by Rachael Bornstein, health policy advisor to Rep. Patrick Kennedy (D-R.I.), a strong supporter of mental health research.

Information about APA’s federal advocacy efforts is posted at <www.capitolconnect.com/apa/default.aspx>.

1 Rep. Chet Edwards (D-Texas) addresses the consortium after receiving the APA Platinum Award for his efforts to better fund research on health problems among veterans, such as those with traumatic brain injury.
2 Jeffrey Akaka, M.D., speaker of the APA Assembly, converses with Rep. Grace Napolitano (D-Calif.).
3 Timothy Condon, Ph.D., deputy director of the National Institute on Drug Abuse, provides Academic Consortium participants with an update on federal funding and coordination of addiction treatment research.
4 Rep. Gene Green (D-Texas) is sponsor of a bill to amend Medicare to coordinate medical care for individuals who have multiple chronic conditions, including dementia.
5 Rep. Joe Wilson (R-S.C.), a member of the Mid-Carolina Mental Health Association, addresses the psychiatric researchers.